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GABON

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I. LAND AND PEOPLE

1. Gabon is a Central African State located in the Gulf of Guinea. Its territory straddles the equator; the Ogooué basin covers 75 per cent of it and equatorial forests nearly 90 per cent. A sedimentary basin 800 km long by 20-300 km wide links it to the ocean.

2. It has a surface area of 267,667 km^2 and is bounded to the north by Cameroon, to the north-east by Equatorial Guinea, to the east and south by the Congo and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean.

3. The population of Gabon was 1,011,710 inhabitants according to the 1993 census. The annual population growth rate is 2.5 per cent, partly due to a positive migratory balance. The infant mortality rate is 6 per cent.

4. The birth rate is 42.2/1,000 and the mortality rate 19.8/1,000.

5. Considerable efforts are made to ensure school attendance by children.

6. The oil sector is one of the key sectors of the nation's economy, contributing 32.93 per cent of GDP. The structure of the GDP was as follows in 1990:

Primary sector:	44.03%	Secondary sector:	13.81%
Agricultural sector:	6.34%	Tertiary sector:	29.94%
Industrial sector:	5.51%	Public administration:	12.22%

7. The unemployment rate was 18 per cent at the time of the 1993 census.

8. The economic growth rate is dependent on the international economic situation and especially on fluctuations in the world oil market.

9. Gabon's external debt, estimated at CFAF 1,017.3 billion in 1990, is approaching CFAF 2,000 billion today due to the combined effects of the devaluation of the CFA franc and the continuing rise in interest rates by approximately 16 to 18 per cent. This forces the country to borrow in order to service its debt, and thus jeopardizes any development prospects. One of the mechanisms currently being used is rescheduling, which is really only a stop-gap measure, for it increases the burden on the budget in the medium term.

10. Up to 1960, there were Catholic missionaries, Protestants and a few isolated Muslims living in Gabon. In the 1970s to 1980s, after Gabon joined the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a number of Muslims settled in Gabon in a display of Islamic solidarity. Today the population of Gabon is mostly Christian. The Catholics are the largest group, followed by the Protestants. There is a growing proportion of Muslims. It should nevertheless be noted that animists still make up a good portion of the population.

II. HISTORY AND GENERAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE

11. Gabon became independent on 17 August 1960. The Republic of Gabon adopted its first Constitution on 21 February 1961.

12. The first President of the Republic of Gabon, Leon M'Ba, died on 28 November 1967 and was succeeded, in accordance with the Constitution, by the Vice-President of the Republic, His Excellency Omar Bongo, who is still in office.

13. The Gabonese Democratic Party - the sole party - was established on 12 March 1968. There was a return to the multi-party system following the national conference held from 23 to 30 March 1990 with the participation of the opposition and all the nation's vital forces. The return to a multi-party system was confirmed by the constitutional revision of 22 May 1990. The first multi-party legislative elections took place in September/October 1990.

14. The National Assembly adopted a new Constitution and a Charter of Political Parties on 15 March 1991.

15. By Act No. 3/91 of 26 March 1991, as amended by Act No. 01/94 of 18 March 1994, the Republic of Gabon revised the Constitution with a view to the disappearance of the Supreme Court and the establishment of three new independent and autonomous courts, namely: the Judicial Court, the Administrative Court and the Accounting Court.

16. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Gabon - Act No. 3/91 of 26 March 1991, as amended by Act No. 01/94 of 18 March 1994 - the President of the Republic is the Head of State. He is the guarantor of territorial integrity, national unity and respect for the Constitution and for international treaties (Constitution, art. 58). He is elected by direct universal suffrage for a five-year term which may be extended only once (Constitution, art. 59).

17. The Prime Minister is the Head of Government. As such, he directs the action of the Government.

18. The legislative power is represented by a parliament comprising two chambers: the National Assembly and the Senate. The members of the National Assembly carry the title of deputy and are elected for a five-year term by direct universal suffrage. The members of the Senate carry the title of senator. They are elected for a six-year term by indirect universal suffrage.

19. The means of control of the legislative power over the executive power are the following: interpellations, written or oral questions and commissions of inquiry and control. The National Assembly may exercise the motion of censure (art. 61).

20. The judicial power is independent of the legislative and executive powers. It is covered in title V of the Constitution.

III. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

21. The Ministry of Human Rights was established in 1987. It has been given a mandate to implement the Government's human rights policy and to coordinate the steps undertaken in this area. The efforts of the Ministry of Human Rights focus on the protection and promotion of human rights.

22. Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Gabon stipulates:

> "The Republic of Gabon recognizes and guarantees the inviolable and imprescriptible human rights by which the public authorities are bound."

23. For people who have been the victims of violations of rights set forth in a human rights instrument, remedies are provided for in the appropriate court, according to the nature of the right violated.

24. The next 22 items provide for the implementation and protection of human rights. They reflect the commitment of the Gabonese Government to the protection of human rights as defined by the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the 1966 International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

IV. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

25. Human rights information and dissemination of the international human rights instruments at the national level remains one of the weakest sectors with regard to the promotion of human rights.